

# PAM 2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN ZAMBIA

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## Assessing 1980 Local Government Act

MARK AS DONE

### Assessing the 1980 Local Administration Act

When the Act was passed, Kaunda hoped that the new system would get on its feet as quickly as possible with a view to achieve its major objectives. This did not however, happen and very little power if any had been transferred to the people. Administration still remained highly centralised. District councils were far from being front liners in the development process as they could not stand on their own feet. Only the offices of the district secretary and the district governor had been fully integrated into District councils while Government Departments continued to operate vertically to their provincial headquarters and directly to Lusaka.

Most district councils particularly the smaller ones became top heavy as there were too many heads of Departments (e.g. many directors at ZESCO). The results had been bureaucratic, infighting coupled with overlapping of the functions.

There were also problems related to finance as councils had not developed the tradition of being independent from the central Government. This dependence stifled local initiative to fully exploit the sources of local revenue. There was also financial mismanagement and interference. The Act also did not give much room for district councils to raise revenue from local sources because rents, rates, fees and charges needed the approval of the Minister.

The lack of statutory integration was replaced by a "dual supervision formula." Under this arrangement, the party and its Government expected provincial and district heads of functional Central Government Departments to be administratively responsible to provincial and district councils and to be technically responsible to their ministries through their own departmental hierarchy. It was not easy to draw and maintain a line between the administrative and technical functions. Because of this problem and other factors, the dual supervision formula had failed to work effectively.

Consequently, local administration in Zambia still remained characterised by the collection of Central Government departments, local authorities and other agencies that were not effectively co-ordinating resulting in the overlapping of



roles, confusion and duplication of efforts and resources.

The district governor for example, was not able to play his role as the overseer of parastatal activities. The various Acts and legal requirements which governed the operations of the parastatals had not been revised to enable the district governor to play an effective role.

The foregoing sentiments or observations were also echoed in the Mvunga commissions constitution report of October 1990 where among other things the majority of the petitioners submitted that while some kind of provincial leadership was necessary, the existing structure was extremely top heavy and greatly weighed in favour of the political department at the expense of social and economic development. Earlier, a special parliamentary select committee appointed by the national assembly in July 1990 also observed that the system of local administration introduced in 1980 under the local administration Act Number 15 had not achieved its intended objectives.

As a matter of fact, the Mvunga commission found the following:-

i) There was a majority wish that the provinces in the third republic should be headed by political appointees who should be called provincial ministers, resident ministers or provincial governors.

ii) A few petitioners suggested the creation of provincial assemblies or councils consisting of elected leaders and traditional chiefs in the province in addition to a small but effective civil service led by a provincial permanent secretary.

iii) At the district level, there was an overwhelming call to revert to the old mayoral or chairmanship system of administration which existed before the enactment of the local administration Act of 1980.

On the basis of the submissions, the commission recommended the following:-

i) The president to appoint the provincial or resident minister who would be in charge of all political functions in the province and would be answerable to the president.

ii) The provincial or resident minister to be assisted by a small but effective team of civil servants.

iii) At the district level, the third republic should revert to the mayoral/chairmanship that existed before the introduction of the local administration system of 1980.



iv) Civil and political functions at the district level must be separated with the former being administered by the political appointee assisted by civil servants headed by the district secretary.

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